

Melissa:

You are listening to *Pull Up a Chair*. Stories from 100 years of creating community in Jewish Baltimore, a podcast created by The Associated: Jewish Federation of Baltimore.

Howard:

We were gonna serve bagels, coffee, cream cheese, and jelly. And you know, like the field of dreams you build it they will come, you feed them, maybe they'll come.

Melissa:

Welcome back to *Pull Up a Chair*, a podcast from The Associated: Jewish Federation of Baltimore. These local stories shine a light on your neighbors and friends, illustrating what it means to build and be a part of a strong Jewish community. I'm your host Melissa Gerr. In this episode, what creates family? Howard and Ann Cornblatt are longtime members of the Edward A. Myerberg Center, a program of CHAI and an agency of The Associated, and a community they've grown to consider like a second family. We'll hear more about that in a few minutes. First, a delve into why the concept of family became so cherished for them in the first place. Here's Ann, who lived for a while on Kennedy Avenue off of North Avenue.

Ann:

And I lived above my father's grocery store, and I can vividly remember that grocery store. We lived there for two years until my mother was pregnant with my brother. And then we moved to the Pimlico area and I lived on Laurel Avenue right around the corner from Sinai Hospital. In fact, where Sinai Hospital now is, that used to be our playground. It was a wonderful area to live in. Pimlico was a terrific neighborhood, with lots of children, always outside.

Howard:

I was born in Marshall, Virginia. I lived there until I was four and a half years old. We moved to Baltimore. My father bought a big house on Bellevue Avenue that also had three apartments in West Arlington and Forest Park. And, our house was behind Tifereth Israel, and that's where I had my bar mitzvah.

Melissa:

Ann and Howard both have fond memories of growing up in Baltimore, where family bonds and cultivating community were always a priority.

Ann:

My mother was one of six children and my father was one of three. We were extremely close with both sides of the family. We celebrated all the holidays together. My grandparents, who originally lived in Virginia, moved here when I was a young girl, and then they got an apartment on Park Heights Avenue. And my bubby would always be cooking and making something. And she's the one who helped teach me how to cook. And I still use a lot of her recipes and my mother's recipes. From those days for all the holidays, we would go to my grandparents' house and we would have 40, to 50 people. I mean, in a small, tiny apartment. We would just laugh and have fun. And to this day, Howard and I still have our families here for all the holidays, and our children are close with their cousins.

Howard:

We would go out to dinner quite a lot with family and friends, and my father and mother and myself, we would pick up my grandparents, and they kept strictly kosher, of course. And we would go down to east Baltimore Street to a place called the Dairy Restaurant on Baltimore, I think in Front Street, if I'm not mistaken. It was an all-white building.

Melissa:

Ann and Howard's paths crossed often when they attended camp or hung out with friends, some of whom were cousins to the other. They dated a bit, just casually on and off. But then eventually they went out on that first big date, but almost didn't.

Howard:

I'd come home from school. And there was a notice that the fraternity was having a dance in three or four weeks. And I called Ann and asked her if she was doing anything. And she says, I'll have to get back to you. And, I said to myself, Hmm, what's going on here in three weeks on a Saturday night? She says, I'll have to let you know, I might have something else to do.

Ann:

I had another date already with somebody who really didn't give me those warm, fuzzy feelings. It was just the guy. And he was nice and he was in college. And I thought to myself, do I really wanna pursue him or would I rather pursue Howard? And I had to make that decision. I remember discussing with my mother and saying, ma, I really, I really feel more for Howard than I do for the other guy. And my decision was, Nope, I'm gonna go with Howard. So I think as I look back, it really made Howard happy and I knew in my heart and soul he was the right guy for me. I really did. I knew it. I had an aunt who died when I was a junior in high school. And I was very close with this aunt and Howard and I had been dating when I was in high school. And on a Saturday night, Howard went with me to Johns Hopkins to see my aunt and was right before she died. And, my aunt asked to speak to me alone, and Howard walked out in the hallway and my aunt said to me, he's the keeper. I really love him. If I'm not here, he's the one for you. And I never forgot that. So I feel very blessed.

Melissa:

Howard and Ann are regulars at the Myerberg Center. It's like a second home for them. And they consider the members like an extended family. Howard has made his mark there too. He, along with Marty Buckman and Sid Rankin started a men's group called the Bagel Boys. They meet weekly to learn and to explore and well, just to kibitz a little. The group has grown exponentially and ran successfully for years. And then like the rest of the world in March of 2020, that all changed.

Howard:

We came to a standstill, and if it wasn't for the fact that the Myerberg was one of the first organizations or groups to go online and Zoom, it became a wonderful, wonderful factor in getting people to be able to meet with other people.

Melissa:

The Bagel Boys rallied, they kept meeting via Zoom from the safety of their homes, their homes, which in many cases included their wives. So the wives joined in and became part of the new Bagel Bunch.

Now that the Myerberg has reopened, the Bagel Bunch continues virtually while the Bagel Boys men only have returned in person.

Howard:

As time went on, my wife would, she'd say, oh, that sounded like a good subject. And she would sit next to me in the chair in front of the laptop and hear what was going on. And other women were sitting with their husbands and word got around that you know, not only men now, but if you belong to the Myerberg, part of the subscription included Bagel Boys. And we had a few guys that didn't like the idea that women were on board. We're a men's group. Well, we finally came to a meeting of the minds, and on Tuesdays we're called the Bagel Boys and we're both on Zoom and in person and on Fridays with the Bagel Bunch. But, I think we've kept the troops happy.

Melissa:

A member of those troops is Howard's wife Ann Cornblatt.

Ann:

Before each session, they get on 15 minutes earlier, and the guys could talk to one another and talk about what they were doing, what they were eating, who they were calling to send the food in from the food stores. They shared all these ideas, this was fabulous. And then they would have a speaker and the wives started coming in. And it was another way for us to be social with everybody. And I think it really helped us to keep our minds going and to be alert and to check with each other.

Howard:

Being part of the Bagel Boys, it provides me socialization, friendship, camaraderie, and knowledge. Every week I learn something, you know, we're never too old to learn. So if you wanna grow physically and mentally, join the Bagel Boys.

Melissa:

Thanks for listening to The Associated podcast, *Pull Up a Chair*, stories from Baltimore's vibrant Jewish community. I'm your host Melissa Gerr. *Pull Up a Chair* is available on iTunes, Spotify, or wherever you get your podcasts. You can also find us on The Associated website. Look for [associated.org/pull up a chair](https://www.associated.org/pull-up-a-chair). Remember to subscribe and leave a rating or review. It really helps others find us and tell your friends and family you've been listening to *Pull Up a Chair*, stories from 100 years of creating community in Jewish Baltimore. It's part of The Associated's Centennial celebration.